

# Songmy Mountain Back

## In Vietnam as a Reporter

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Special to The New York Times

CHULAI, South Vietnam, Sept. 19—"There are a lot of people in the Army who would like to get you, Ron," Maj. William Gabella, information officer for the Americal Division, said.

His warning was for 24-year-old Ronald Ridenhour, a Vietnam veteran who returned in August as a correspondent for

Dispatch News Service. It was the letters that Mr. Ridenhour sent last year to the Army and to people in Congress and in the executive branch that led to an investigation of the massacre in 1968 of Vietnamese civilians at a site called Songmy and sometimes Mylai.

The men in the infantry unit accused of the killings were from Company A in the Americal Division. Its headquarters are at Chulai.

Mr. Ridenhour protested that Major Gabella, in an attempt to have him watched, assigned an officer to escort him last Friday when he joined a line company near Ducpho. His escort was Lieut. John Peterson, who works in the information center at Ducpho, site of the Americal fire support base named Bronco. On the night before their departure Mr. Ridenhour was warned by Lieutenant Peterson that he would have to listen during any conversation between him and G.I.'s in the line company.

### Shook Off Escort

When they joined the line company, however, about six miles away from Ducpho, Mr. Ridenhour shook off the lieutenant. Since the line company did not move out on operations, the two men returned to Ducpho.

The presence of an officer is considered by many correspondents in Vietnam to be a form of censorship. Enlisted men, who often have different version of how the war is going from the one given in official briefings, do not often talk freely when an officer is listening.

There are no fixed rules on the question of escorts. The decision depends on the individual information officer in each division. Correspondents are not normally accompanied in the field when they request otherwise.

Mr. Ridenhour went to Chulai and Ducpho for a series of articles he is writing on front-line infantrymen for Dispatch News Service.

He was again assigned an officer to escort him when on Saturday he visited a base camp called Bayonet, near Chulai, again on the orders of Major Gabella. Mr. Ridenhour had asked that he not be escorted.

"They certainly paid more attention to me as a journalist than I merited," Mr. Ridenhour said, with sarcasm.

He found the nervousness

in the Americal Division's military region not surprising.

"If something is not reported, then the Army takes the view it did not happen," Mr. Ridenhour said. "To them Mylai never occurred—until it was reported."

A typical attitude of some career officers in the Americal Division was shown, in Chulai, by the Deputy Provost Marshal, Maj. Robert Bromblay. In a conversation with another correspondent who had accompanied Mr. Ridenhour, the major said that disclosures of the Songmy killings had been "bad for the army." He inquired about Mr. Ridenhour's political affiliations and questioned what his motives were in writing the letters.

Mr. Ridenhour, who was a soldier in Vietnam from December, 1967, to December, 1968, was not present at the massacre. He knew some men in the unit that was at Songmy because they had trained together in Hawaii. Mr. Ridenhour heard of the massacre in April, 1968. He wrote a letter and mailed 30 copies of it in March, 1969, from his home in Phoenix, Ariz.



Ronald Ridenhour, who told of deaths at Songmy, re-visit